

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 STATE 159811
ORIGIN NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: EUR/SOV:SMCALL

APPROVED BY: JAARMITAGE

EUR/SOV:RLBARRY

S/S-O:RPERITO

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BONN PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 159811

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT MOSCOW 9621 SENT ACTION SECSTATE 05 JUL 77

QUOTE S E C R E T MOSCOW 9621

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: BREZHNEV'S HEALTH

SUMMARY: IMPRESSION FROM HOUR-AND-FORTY-MINUTE MEETING WITH
BREZHNEV TODAY IS THAT REPORTS OF BREZHNEV'S DECLINING
HEALTH MAY HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED. HE SEEMED ALERT, MOBILE AND HIS
ENUNCIATION WAS NO WORSE THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR SEVERAL YEARS.
IN FACT, HE SEEMED IN BETTER SHAPE THAN IN MARCH MEETING
WITH SECRETARY. END SUMMARY.

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1. I CAME AWAY FROM MY MEETING WITH BREZHNEV TODAY WITH
THE OVERALL IMPRESSION THAT SOME OF THE RECENT REPORTS
OF A SHARP DETERIORATION IN HIS HEALTH - PARTICULARLY THOSE
EMANATING FROM PARIS FOLLOWING HIS RECENT VISIT THERE - MAY HAVE
EXAGGERATED THE DECLINE. OUR SESSION WAS LONG ENOUGH TO
PROVIDE SOME TEST OF HIS STAMINA, BUT HE REMAINED ALERT TO THE
END. ALTHOUGH HE REFERRED TO A PREPARED TEXT FOR HIS BASIS

COMMENTS, HE OFTEN DEVIATED FROM IT, AND DID NOT READ IT MECHANICALLY. INDEED, HE DELIVERED ALL HIS COMMENTS WITH A GOOD DEAL OF VERVE AND SEEMED TO CATCH THE POINTS I MADE PROMPTLY AND WITHOUT HELP. HE WAS AT TIMES FUZZY ON DETAILS - SUCH AS DATES OF MEETINGS (HE HAD TO BE REMINDED THAT THE NEXT VANCE-GROMYKO MEETING WOULD BE IN SEPTEMBER) OR WHETHER THE SOVIET POPULATION IS 252 MILLION OR 258 MILLION - BUT HE HAS LONG BEEN A "BIG PICTURE" MAN WHO DOES NOT RETAIN DETAILS THE WAY KOSYGIN, FOR EXAMPLE, DOES. HIS ENUNCIATION WAS COMPARATIVELY GOOD WITH ONLY OCCASIONAL - AND FOR HIM RELATIVELY SLIGHT - SLURRING. HIS WALK HAD A SLIGHTLY WOODEN CAST TO IT, BUT HE WAS QUITE MOBIL THROUGHOUT, SEVERAL TIMES RISING FROM HIS SEAT TO PUT BITS OF PAPER IN THE WASTEBASKET OR TO PERFORM OTHER SMALL CHORES ON IMPULSE.

2. THE FOLLOWING SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS MAY BE OF INTEREST TO SPECIALISTS IN HIS HEALTH:

-- HE WORE HIS HEARING AID AND HAD NO APPARENT DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING NORMAL CONVERSATION.
-- HIS FACE SHOWED NO VISIBLE MARKS AND THERE WAS NO UNUSUAL PUFFINESS. (HIS FACE, INDEED, SEEMED LESS PUFFY THAN IT DID TO DCM WHEN HE MET WITH ASTRONAUTS AND COSMONAUTS OVER 18 MONTHS AGO OR TO ME IN MARCH
-- HIS EYES HAD A SOMEWHAT GLAZED OR, PERHAPS BETTER EXPRESSED, OPAQUE APPEARANCE TOWARD THE END, BUT HE REMAINED ALERT TO THE
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CONVERSATION.

-- HE STILL DOES NOT SMOKE, BUT HE ASKED SUKHODREV TO SMOKE SO THAT HE COULD ENJOY THE AROMA.

3. OBVIOUSLY I CANNOT AND DO NOT PRESENT MY OBSERVATIONS AS INFORMED MEDICAL OPINION, AND I WOULD NOT EXAGGERATE THE POSITIVE. BREZHNEV'S HEALTH IS NOT ROBUST, AND HAS NOT BEEN SO FOR SOME TIME. HOWEVER, I FAILED TO NOTE ANY CLEAR SIGNS OF A RECENT SHARP DECLINE.
TOON

UNQUOTE VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HEALTH, MEETING REPORTS, MEETINGS, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 09-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE159811
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: EUR/SOV:SMCALL
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: N770004-0200
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
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Line Count: 106
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ff41f96d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1912018
Secure: LOCK1
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BREZHNEV'S HEALTH SUMMARY: IMPRESSION FROM HOUR-AND-FORTY-MINUTE MEETING WITH BREZHNEV TODAY IS THAT REPORTS OF BREZHNEV'S DECLI
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UR, (TOON, MALCOLM), (BREZHNEV, LEONID)
To: PARIS BONN
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ff41f96d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009